

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

University of Nebraska Press -- Sample Books and
Chapters

University of Nebraska Press

2014

Peace Be Still

Matthew C. Whitaker

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/unpresssamples>

Whitaker, Matthew C., "Peace Be Still" (2014). *University of Nebraska Press -- Sample Books and Chapters*. 244.
<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/unpresssamples/244>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the University of Nebraska Press at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in University of Nebraska Press -- Sample Books and Chapters by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

PEACE BE STILL

[Buy the Book](#)

PEACE BE STILL

**MODERN BLACK AMERICA FROM
WORLD WAR II TO BARACK OBAMA**

MATTHEW C. WHITAKER

University of Nebraska Press | Lincoln and London

[Buy the Book](#)

© 2013 by the Board of Regents of the University of Nebraska
Portions of chap. 1 were previously published in the author's
Race Work: The Rise of Civil Rights in the Urban West (Lin-
coln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 63–87. © 2005 by
the Board of Regents of the University of Nebraska.
Portions of chap. 6 were previously published in *Hurricane*
Katrina: America's Unnatural Disaster, edited by Jeremy I.
Levitt and Matthew C. Whitaker (Lincoln: University of
Nebraska Press, 2009), 1–10. © 2009 by Jeremy I. Levitt and
Matthew C. Whitaker.

All rights reserved. Manufactured in the United States of
America. ∞

Publication of this volume was assisted by the Virginia
Faulkner Fund, established in memory of Virginia Faulkner,
editor in chief of the University of Nebraska Press.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Whitaker, Matthew C.

Peace be still: modern black America from World War II to
Barack Obama / Matthew C. Whitaker.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-8032-4693-5 (cloth: alk. paper)

ISBN 978-0-8032-4964-6 (paperback: alk. paper)

1. African Americans—History—1877–1964. 2. African
Americans—Social conditions—20th century. 3. African
Americans—Social conditions—21st century. 4. African
Americans—Politics and government—20th century. 5. Afri-
can Americans—Politics and government—21st century.
6. Civil rights movements—United States—History—20th
century. I. Title.

E185.6.W57 2013

973'.0496073—dc23

2013029667

Set in Minion Pro by Laura Wellington.

Designed by A. Shahan.

I dedicate this book to the person who
put me on the path and set me free, my
mother, Covey L. Whitaker.

Contents

Illustrations	ix
Acknowledgments	xi
Introduction: American History as African American History	1
1. “Make Way for Democracy,” 1939–1954	7
2. “Let Your Motto Be Resistance,” 1954–1961	53
3. “Deep Rumbling of Discontent,” 1961–1968	85
4. “So Let It Be Done,” 1968–1980	133
5. “To the Break of Dawn,” 1980–2000	169
6. “The Audacity of Hope,” 2000–2008	213
7. Contemporary Black America	247
8. Hope and Change: The New Millennium and Freedom’s Promise	279
Appendix 1: Excerpts from the U.S. Constitution (1787)	307
Appendix 2: Executive Order #8802 (1941)	309
Appendix 3: <i>Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka</i> (1954)	311
Appendix 4: The Civil Rights Act of 1964	313
Appendix 5: The Voting Rights Act of 1965	317
Appendix 6: Fair Housing Act (1968)	321
Appendix 7: “A More Perfect Union” (2008)	323

Appendix 8: African American Population as a Percentage of the Total Population, 1870–2008	333
Appendix 9: Distribution of the African American Population by Region, 1870–2008	335
Appendix 10: Black Population in the Twenty Largest U.S. Cities, 2008	337
Notes	339
Bibliography	349
Index	375

Illustrations

1. Dorie Miller	16
2. First black members of the Women's Army Corps	20
3. Tuskegee Airmen	26
4. Jackie Robinson	45
5. George E. C. Hayes, Thurgood Marshall, and James M. Nabrit	50
6. Mamie Till	57
7. Rosa Parks	61
8. Martin Luther King Jr.	65
9. Malcolm X	78
10. Freedom Riders	81
11. Martin Luther King Jr. at the March on Washington	96
12. Fannie Lou Hamer	101
13. Muhammad Ali	111
14. Tommie Smith and John Carlos	113
15. Angela Davis	114
16. Sidney Poitier	116
17. The Black Panther Party	121
18. Stokely Carmichael	123
19. James Brown, the "Godfather of Soul"	124
20. Richard Pryor	148
21. Clarence Thomas	173
22. Anita Hill	176
23. Michael Jackson and Quincy Jones	186
24. Jesse Jackson	192

25. Nelson Mandela	197
26. Colin Powell and Condoleezza Rice	205
27. Barack Obama	229
28. New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina	232
29. Oprah Winfrey	239
30. Michael Jordan	240
31. Toni Morrison	250
32. Russell Simmons and Sean “Diddy” Combs	261
33. John Hope Franklin	264
34. Barack Obama, 2009 presidential inauguration	285
35. New York protestors	288
36. Eric Holder	300
37. Barack Obama, 2011 State of the Union address	302

Acknowledgments

Favor is priceless. I have benefited from the good deeds of many people, and if my wealth were determined by the goodwill they have given me, my buying power would rival that of Bill Gates. Indeed, I am truly beholden to many institutions, colleagues, friends, and family for enabling me to write this book. I thank the following people at Arizona State University for encouraging my research, writing, teaching, and service-based intellectual life: Michael M. Crow, president; Elizabeth Capaldi, executive vice president and provost of the University; Frederick Corey, vice provost and dean, University College; Elaine Sweet, assistant dean, University College; Robert Page, vice president and dean, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences; Neal A. Lester, associate vice president, Office of Knowledge Enterprise Development; Norma Villa, manager of the School of Historical, Philosophical, and Religious Studies; Marjorie Zatz, director of the Justice and Social Inquiry Program; Jewell Parker Rhodes, Virginia C. Piper Chair of Creative Writing; and colleagues Thomas J. Davis, Paul Hirt, Pat Lauderdale, Stephen Marc, Brooks D. Simpson, Pamela Stewart, and Mark von Hagen. I also appreciate the support of the School of Letters and Sciences and the intellectually stimulating collaboration with Deborah Cox and Sarah Herrera that I have experienced in ASU's Center for the Study of Race and Democracy.

I am truly indebted to the following scholars at other universities throughout the United States for their considerable assistance and support: Gordon Bakken, California State University–Fullerton; Albert S. Broussard, Texas A&M University; William Jelani Cobb, University of Connecticut; Ronald G. Coleman, University of Utah; Pero Dagbovie, Michigan State University; Eric Duke, University of South Florida; Darlene Clark Hine, Northwestern University; Peniel E. Joseph, Tufts University;

Robin D. G. Kelley, University of California, Los Angeles; Wilma King, University of Missouri–Columbia; Nell Irvin Painter, Princeton University; Vicki Ruiz, University of California–Irvine; Quintard Taylor Jr., University of Washington; Joe William Trotter Jr., Carnegie Mellon University; Rhonda Y. Williams, Case Western Reserve University; and Yohuru Williams, Fairfield University.

I am particularly obliged to Patricia Etter (retired) and Chris Marin of the Department of Manuscripts and Special Collections at the Hayden Library and to the staff of the Government Documents Division at Arizona State University. Individuals at the Planning Department of the City of Phoenix, Arizona, also contributed greatly to the completion of this book. The Michigan Historical Collection at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor; the New York Public Library's Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture; the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History in Detroit, Michigan; the DuSable Museum of African American History in Chicago, Illinois; the National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis, Tennessee; and the Martin Luther King Center in Atlanta, Georgia also provided me much needed access to both primary and secondary sources that helped inform this synthesis of modern African American history.

I must invoke the names of, and pay respect to, my predecessors and mentors (direct and indirect), whose trailblazing work gave rise to and advanced the field of African American history. The following historians and their work made this book possible: George Washington Williams, Carter G. Woodson, Lorenzo J. Greene, W. E. B. Du Bois, Charles Harris Wesley, John Henrik Clarke, Walter Rodney, Herbert Aptheker, August Meier, Elliott Rudwick, John Hope Franklin, Lerone Bennett, Jr., Nathan Irvin Huggins, Mary Frances Berry, George Frederickson, Eric Foner, Nell Irvin Painter, Darlene Clark Hine, Manning Marable, Leon Litwack, Joe William Trotter Jr., George Lipsitz, V. P. Franklin, David Levering Lewis, Clayborne Carson, Deborah Gray White, Earl Lewis, and Robin D. G. Kelley.

I am grateful to my students, the torchbearers who will push the study of African American history to a new level of sophistication and relevance in the twenty-first century. *Peace Be Still* benefited from their critical support, fresh ideas, and encouragement. I am particularly grateful for the assistance of current and former graduate students Monica Butler and Elyssa Ford. A special note of thanks is due to Megan Falater, whose passion, intelligence, and commitment enhanced the quality of this book.

I must also acknowledge my good friends: Robert Hackett, Jason B. “Sugar Bear” Harris, Carole Coles Henry, Lasana O. Hotep, Alonzo Jones, John L. Jones, Jeremy I. Levitt, Robert Robertson, Dan Robbins and Kristi Rutz-Robbins, and Michael A. Smart. They continue to remind me that intellectual life and fun are not antithetical and that the “ivory tower,” like life, is often what you make of it. To Jill Schiefelbein, your keen eye greatly improved the quality of this work. This book would not have been possible without the support and counsel of Carolyn Kaluzniacki and Art Newman. They reminded me that “every shut eye ain’t sleep, and every goodbye ain’t gone.”

Finally, for giving me inspiration and sustaining me with love and affection, I thank Cassondra “Lovey” Blackwell; my doting, elegant, and astonishingly patient mother, Covey L. Whitaker; my razor-sharp, witty, and shrewd late grandmother, Doris V. Whitaker; my daughter, Anastacia, whose stirring confidence is surpassed only by her unyielding humanity; and my son, Jackson, whose creativity and passion renew my hope for a brighter future.

PEACE BE STILL

[Buy the Book](#)

INTRODUCTION

American History as African American History

“Moses, my servant, is dead. Therefore arise and go over Jordan.”
There are no deliverers. They’re all dead. We must arise and go over
Jordan. We can take the promised Land.

—NANNIE BURROUGHS, “Unload Your Toms,” *Louisiana Weekly*,
December 23, 1933

History exists within the past and the present. Although we tend to view the past as complete and fixed regardless of the passage of time, it is far from static. If you consider how many things occurred in the lives of individuals, peoples, and nations at any given moment in history, you will realize that the historian is compelled to select that which is important from these myriad events in order to ascertain the meaning of what happened. These distinctions between the important and the unimportant are of course made in the present. We do not identify that which we believe is essential knowledge if history delves into an impenetrable and irrelevant knot of minutiae. Chronicling and evaluating the past is the vocation of historians, who craft “historical narrative” with the aim of offering readers a sound account of the past that is understandable in the present. Historical narrative, therefore, inevitably empowers some individuals and events with historical significance and neglects, overlooks, and repudiates the historical value of others.

In any event, historical narrative evolves constantly, as what we yearn to know about the past changes in relation to what is important to us now and what will be important to us in the future. You do not have to look very far into our American past to see that such changes have unfolded.

Indeed, before the modern civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, American history was viewed almost entirely as the history of white people. Most white Americans simply believed that there was nothing of interest to investigate or note in African American history. This has changed. African American history is now one of the most vibrant subfields in the discipline. The same can be said of women's history. Before the feminist movement of the 1970s, American history was primarily the story of men. This is no longer the case. The last thirty years have witnessed an explosion of literature devoted to women's history. In both subfields and in many others, more changes are on the horizon and the chronicling of history continues to progress.

As historians are continually challenged by new issues and questions, the past constantly yields new insights and discoveries. This is why African American history written even a generation ago is less suited to address all of the concerns of today's readers. In the last quarter century much has happened, so those who study African American history are asking different questions of the past. Today we want to know what black men *and* women did, what Sly Stone's "everyday people" were thinking and doing, the role culture played in black people's daily lives, the role class played in black communities, how black people interacted with other people of color, how region has factored into the evolution of African American communities, even how rap music and hip-hop have shaped African Americans and, ostensibly, recent American history and life.

Peace Be Still, a concise history of African Americans since World War II, addresses these questions. In doing so, it will argue that the history of African Americans since 1941 is nothing short of a remarkable story of a people who worked hard to give meaning to their freedom and reconstruct the United States into a nation that delivers to *all* of its people that which is promised in its documents of freedom. Inasmuch as modern American history has been greatly influenced and at times defined by the history and lives of people of African descent, this book will turn things around, casting the history of the United States in the mid-twentieth and early twenty-first centuries within the experiences of Americans of African descent. Finally, *Peace Be Still* offers considerable coverage of the arts and culture of modern black America, distinguishing it from other histories that adopt a linear approach and focus almost exclusively on politics and resistance.

“During the past twenty-five years, African American history has become an established field of intellectual inquiry. Not only is it one of the most vibrant subfields in American history, answering some of the most pressing questions of the hour and hosting some of the most stimulating historical debates, but it is also changing the way in which we view American history as a whole. African American history is not merely the addition of black people to a larger American historical narrative; it has its own issues and concerns.”¹

Like most recent studies of black history and life, *Peace Be Still* is not simply a story of victimization, despite the indignities and acts of terrorism African Americans have endured. Instead, it chronicles the history of a people who dared to fight the forces that sought to dehumanize and oppress them, who fashioned a dynamic culture of artistic and religious expression, educational and professional advancement, in addition to resistance to oppression and marginalization. It examines black intellectualism and professionalism and emphasizes the prominence and interconnectedness of black institutions and interracial alliances. Most important, *Peace Be Still* offers readers a vibrant and accessible history of African Americans since World War II, encouraging them to reconsider the “consensus” view of American history by highlighting the extent to which African American history illuminates the promise, conflicts, contradictions, hopes, and victories that all Americans share.²

The narrative begins by examining the powerful influence World War II had on the United States, particularly how it stirred African American activism and electrified the modern civil rights movement. “Roused by generations of discrimination, buoyed by a swelling population, and inspired by World War II and America’s renewed promise of democracy, African Americans seized the time to quicken their longstanding quest for equality.”³

Although World War II intensified activism and replenished hope in black communities, the war’s ultimate impact on African Americans was mixed. “While World War II ushered in a period of unprecedented progress in black employment, mobility, and professional activism, America’s crusade in the name of freedom and democracy failed to reach millions of its black citizens at home. White supremacy and racial discrimination flourished in the United States during the war.” Black leaders called for the ‘Double V’: African Americans’ fight against fascism abroad, and their battle against white supremacy at home.”⁴

“Like World War I, World War II generated employment opportunities for blacks and stimulated another phase in what historians have labeled the Great Migration of African Americans from the South to the North and West. Masses of black migrants again flooded some of America’s largest northern and western cities in search of the ‘promised land,’ only to find racial segregation, financial distress, and limited upward mobility. Even successful blacks were targeted by unhappy and racist whites who abhorred black competition in the workplace and did not welcome black people as neighbors. Racial conflict often led to violence, as discord between white and black workers and their communities triggered white terrorism and race riots in cities throughout the United States.”⁵

World War II permanently changed the African American experience. The war and postwar years brought new employment opportunities and an enhanced self-awareness to black people. At the same time, African Americans no longer tolerated second-class citizenship in the face of their recent sacrifices for the nation and repudiated as hypocritical U.S. rhetoric, policy, and actions that sought to end the reign of murderous, racist dictators while maintaining discriminatory and segregationist practices not only in the South, but in many other parts of the nation.⁶

The wartime experiences of black people, both overseas and on the home front, and the adversarial climate of the Cold War that followed set the stage for the peak years of the civil rights movement. Black World War II veterans returned from the war determined to make *their* America safe for democracy, too. Extremely sensitive about its image abroad during the Cold War, the United States felt pressure to live up to its lofty ideals regarding justice and equality at last. The racial friction that came to a head during World War II foretold an even more intense period of racial discord and progress between 1946 and 1970. World War II laid bare the longstanding inconsistencies between America’s rhetoric and the truth about its denial of social and economic equality to its black citizens. Black people committed themselves to ensuring that America delivered on its promise of freedom and democracy for all. They also worked to connect the era’s black freedom struggle to liberation movements around the world. If the efforts of African Americans to seek justice and equality have caused historians to label this story “the long civil rights movement,” the renewal of those efforts during and after World War II gave birth to “the modern civil rights movement.”⁷

Rallying support for black liberation and racial equality from churches, mutual aid societies, fraternal organizations, and everyday people, activists within the modern civil rights movement devised creative strategies for the liberation of black people in America. African Americans of every persuasion, young and old, rich and poor, educated and untaught, organized to strike out against the edifice of white supremacy and racial inequality. They often met staunch resistance from government officials and from most white Americans. African Americans possessed different ideas about how the movement should be conducted, even though they often shared a communal desire for liberation and racial equality.⁸

The black freedom struggle of the 1960s and the various protest movements it spawned developed techniques and organizations that finally brought America face to face with the conflict between its democratic ideals and the somber realities of racism, sexism, and elitism. Throughout the decade, activists squared off against the fierce resistance of white supremacists, sexists, and defenders of the economic status quo. The activism of these insurgent forces forced three presidents, Congress, and leaders of the private sector to respond and take action. The black power movement instilled a greater sense of pride and self-determination in black Americans, and an unprecedented number of African American leaders were elected to high-ranking political offices. In 1972, congresswoman Shirley Chisholm mounted a bid for the presidency itself.⁹

By 1970, despite the assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr. and of Robert F. Kennedy, a presidential hopeful who supported civil rights, economic opportunity and the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Vietnam, many African Americans were optimistic about the possibility of a brighter future. The ranks of the black middle class swelled, corporate America diversified, and relatively large numbers of well-to-do black people moved to ever-expanding suburbs. The majority of African Americans, however, did not fare so well over the next four decades. Enormous economic and political changes severely retarded many of the gains black Americans had made between 1946 and 1970. Deindustrialization, outsourcing, downsizing, reductions in federal spending on inner cities, attacks on affirmative action, underfunded and poorly administered schools, and the reemergence of deliberate acts of racism led to high rates of African American unemployment, increases in black poverty, and decreases in African American social and political capital.¹⁰

African Americans responded to these complex challenges in ways that reveal the heterogeneity and dynamism of a black community and culture marked by diverse and sometimes conflicting elements including a resurgent black nationalism, committed black feminisms, black neoconservatism, African and Caribbean immigration, and the global domination of hip-hop. In short, African Americans continue to resist marginalization, seek equality, confront intraracial differences and hostilities, and deeply influence American life in search of their promised land.

1

“MAKE WAY FOR DEMOCRACY,” 1939–1954

Be not dismayed in these terrible times. You possess power, great power. Our problem is to hitch it up [to] action on the broadest, daring, and most gigantic scale.

—A. PHILIP RANDOLPH, Detroit, Michigan, September 26, 1942

African American life during the Great Depression and World War II created the framework for the development of the modern civil rights movement. Forged to destroy both legal and extralegal racial discrimination and segregation, the civil rights movement was profoundly embedded in the sustained transformation of average black people into agents of their own liberation. This movement was also linked with the growth of the black middle class, the ascendance of community-based institutions, and watershed legal victories in federal courts against institutionalized racial discrimination. In addition, black Americans made use of political and social changes to advance their agenda. These changes included the advent of television, the global decolonization movement, and America's claim on leadership of the “free world” during the Cold War. The civil rights movement grew out of a bevy of local grassroots struggles, yet black people also created new organizations and fashioned local and regional events into a broader national, and ultimately international, movement. Although African American activists encountered massive white resistance and struggled with serious internal disputes, activists eventually secured support from a critical mass of white supporters and some other people of color, and together they advanced the fight for full citizenship and equality that had been initiated one century earlier. In short, World War II helped ignite the modern civil rights movement, which was, in essence, America's second Reconstruction.

As the Great Depression lingered and the world economy struggled throughout the 1930s, powerful forces emerged from the abyss of destruction and despair in Europe and Asia to pose serious challenges to peace and prosperity around the globe. Adolf Hitler in Germany and Benito Mussolini in Italy rose to power during the 1920s and 1930s, exploited the fears and vulnerability of their citizenries, and formed an imperialist alliance known as the Axis. This fascist collaboration championed a fanatical nationalism that censored domestic resistance and employed terrorism, coercion, and violence to expand its empires beyond the borders of their nation-states. For his part, Hitler was a staunch white supremacist, one committed to ridding the world of people of color. Fiercely antisemitic, he held Jews responsible for Germany's many economic and social problems. Hitler's Nazi Party also abhorred gypsies, homosexuals, and people of African descent. Just as Hitler initiated a genocidal campaign to "cleanse" Germany of all Jews, so too did he develop and execute plans to discriminate against, torture, and murder gypsies, homosexuals, and black people. His hatred of black people led him to label jazz music as "nigger" music and prohibit the playing of jazz in German cities.

Through political pressure and military force, Germany came to dominate much of Europe during the 1930s, with Great Britain and France seemingly unwilling or unable to stop it. In August 1939, the Soviet Union signed a nonaggression pact with Germany, which gave Hitler a free hand to invade Poland on September 1, 1939. Although the Soviet Union was not part of the Axis powers (Germany, Japan, and Italy), it invaded Finland shortly thereafter. Britain and France, both allies of Poland, could no longer ignore the situation. They declared war on Germany, and World War II had begun. At virtually the same time, Japan moved to expand its empire in Asia. The Japanese government had long opposed the incursions of British, French, Dutch, and American colonial interests in the Far East and South Pacific. Japan also had collided with the Soviet Union in Manchuria and fought with China throughout the 1930s.

The United States allied itself with China and denounced Japan's association with Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. The United States also declared its intentions to support Britain, doing what it could to send supplies to the beleaguered British after the fall of France to Hitler in the spring of 1940. In June 1941, a third nation joined the alliance. That month Germany invaded the Soviet Union, and the United States and Great Britain chose to extend the hand of friendship to the Russians. However, the United States

refrained from formal entry into the conflict as a full-fledged participant until the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, Hawaii on December 7, 1941, an event that stunned the nation and left America's premier Pacific military base and much of the Navy's Pacific fleet severely damaged. Within days, the United States was at war with Germany and Italy as well.

Honor, Duty, and Deception: African Americans in World War II

The American entry into World War II, which followed the attack on Pearl Harbor, changed the nation forever. It emerged from the conflict as the world's wealthiest and most industrialized military power. As before, waging war ushered in an era of significant change, challenge, and opportunity for African Americans. If it meant unprecedented progress in employment, mobility, and professional activism for many African Americans, America's grand crusade to make the world safe for democracy and free peoples everywhere from racist dictators failed to reach millions of its own black citizens, who still lacked access to freedom and democracy themselves. Without a doubt, white supremacy and Jim Crow segregation thrived in the United States during the war, but black Americans resisted their oppression at home even as they defended the nation abroad.

Many black people became politically active during the war, both domestically and internationally, as they drew inspiration from other people of African descent and from black nation states around the world. Ethiopia, Haiti, and Liberia were the only three black-governed nations in the world at the time, and their independence uplifted black people throughout the world. When Italy invaded Ethiopia in 1935, black people throughout America watched with anger and frustration. The black press covered the brutality of the invasion and the horrors perpetrated against Ethiopians. African Americans responded by holding rallies and fundraisers in support of the "Ethiopian cause." Although the Ethiopians fought bravely, Italy defeated them using every means at its disposal, including toxic gas. The Ethiopian struggle motivated many black Americans to pay close attention to the unfolding of World War II, Africa, and the racial tyranny associated with fascism.

African Americans who subscribed to leftist ideas and politics were also stirred, between 1936 and 1937, by a civil war between the Spanish government and a fascist insurgency orchestrated by General Francisco Franco, an ally of Germany and Italy. Approximately one hundred black Americans served in Spain with the Abraham Lincoln Battalion, a mul-

tiracial unit of three thousand American volunteers. Many of the black people who joined the Abraham Lincoln Battalion did so as an expression of a Marxist notion of internationalism, but, for the great majority of African Americans, the nation's massive mobilization for World War II enlisted them in the cause of ending fascism abroad and destroying Jim Crow and racial injustice at home.

Although mobilization put millions of Americans back to work and gave the U.S. economy a powerful boost, wartime industry did not create immediate opportunities for African Americans. Between 1939 and 1941, expenditures on armaments effectively ended the Great Depression. While white wartime laborers experienced a boom in employment opportunities, most black Americans found factory doors shut to them. The majority of American manufacturers refused to employ blacks in anything other than menial labor positions, even if the applicants were qualified to perform highly skilled labor. In addition, many locals of the American Federation of Labor (AFL) entered into "closed-shop" contracts with employers who forbade the hiring of African American workers on the grounds that they were not already union members, neatly skirting the fact that the AFL denied membership to black people in the first place. The president of North American Aviation communicated the feelings of white business and labor leaders across the nation when he professed, "Regardless of their training as aircraft workers, we will not employ Negroes. It is against our policy." A top oil company official also refused to hire African Americans, arguing that the drilling and producing of oil wells was a "white man's job" and that it was "going to stay that way."¹

Despite President Franklin D. Roosevelt's efforts to include black people in New Deal programs, the federal government did nothing to discourage discriminatory practices as the nation mobilized for war. In its own training and placement programs, the U.S. Employment Service (USES) submitted to the racial customs of white neighborhoods by acquiescing to the demands of businesses for "whites only." In a flagrant instance of organized racism, the leading USES training site, located in Inglewood, California, considered any black person on or near city streets after sunset eligible for apprehension and incarceration; in other words, only black people at the training facility were under curfew. Even the U.S. military, after admitting black men in numbers that corresponded to their percentage of the population, continued to segregate them and consigned them to service and support positions. The Army Air Corps initially rejected

African Americans completely. Black women often fared even worse; they were rarely allowed to work in defense industries, with many companies arguing that they were best suited for domestic work.

White supremacy and racial discrimination in the armed forces endured even as military leaders fiercely repelled calls for integration. Among the African Americans who took on these conditions was A. Philip Randolph, who had come to national prominence as the founder of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, the first African American labor union formally recognized by the AFL. Pullman porters, dissatisfied with their treatment by the Chicago-based Pullman Company, sought the assistance of Randolph and others in organizing their own union in 1925. By 1942, the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters was one of the largest and most powerful predominantly black organizations in America.

The black press also called attention to the persistence of segregation and exclusion of African Americans in the war effort. On January 31, 1942, the *Pittsburgh Courier*, founded in 1907 and once the country's most widely circulated black newspapers, published a letter written to Robert Vann, the newspaper's editor, that helped to alter the trajectory of African American history. James C. Thompson of Wichita, Kansas, communicated his yearning for African Americans to "keep defense and victory in the forefront so that we don't lose sight of our fight for true democracy at home." He reasoned that if the Allied nations used the "V" for Victory sign to rally citizens in opposition to aggression, imperialism, and tyranny, then black Americans should embrace the "double V": victory over fascism abroad and victory over white supremacy at home. The *Pittsburgh Courier* adopted Thompson's notion, creating the phrase "Double V" for "Double Victory." Soon all the black press, as well as civil rights leaders and organizations, had embraced the concept. The Double V campaign inspired black people and organizations to intensify their protests against racist practices in the military. Walter White of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), T. Arnold Hill, chairman of the National Urban League (NUL), Lester Granger, also of the NUL, black New York Congressman Adam Clayton Powell Jr., Robert Vann, and Mabel K. Staupers of the National Association of Colored Graduate Nurses (NACGN) joined Randolph in leading the protest. They helped mobilize African American workers, women's groups, college students, officials, and interracial alliances to resist inequality.

At a time when American officials, generals, and editors presented the nation to the world as a shining example of freedom and equality, African Americans forced those same officials, generals, and editors to acknowledge the glaring inconsistencies rooted in their declared principles and behaviors. White supremacy persisted during the course of the war, but the efforts of the black rank-and-file and protest organizations—along with the continuing need of the military for soldiers and industry for laborers—eventually weakened the institution of segregation.

The March on Washington Movement

A. Philip Randolph prepared African American communities to engage the U.S. government directly. On September 27, 1940, Randolph, along with Walter White and T. Arnold Hill, met with President Roosevelt in the Oval Office. Roosevelt greeted the black delegation and engaged them in polite small talk, asking Randolph, “Which class were you in at Harvard?” Randolph, who graduated from Cookman Institute in Florida and attended evening classes at New York City College, responded flatly, “I never went to Harvard, Mr. President.” Randolph grew more impatient by the moment, as Roosevelt proceeded to speak cordially with White and Hill. Finally, Randolph snapped. “Mr. President, time is running on,” he said. “You are quite busy, I know, but what we want to talk to you about is the problem of jobs for Negroes in defense industries.” The meeting ended with Roosevelt having promised nothing.²

Randolph prepared to confront the federal government publicly. After months of deliberation and preliminary planning, he announced the creation of the March on Washington Movement (MOWM) on January 25, 1941. Some one hundred thousand African American protestors would march to the steps of the nation’s capital if Roosevelt refused to take meaningful action on behalf of racial equality. There was only one way to avoid such an embarrassing confrontation. Randolph demanded that the president issue an executive order to outlaw racial discrimination in companies that signed government contracts, eradicate the exclusion of blacks from defense training programs on the basis of race, and order the USes to place workers in jobs on a nondiscriminatory basis. Randolph also called for the end of segregation in the military, asking the president to endorse legislation that would withhold any resources associated with the National Labor Relations Act from unions that denied membership to black Americans.

Randolph's actions constituted a radical shift from the strategies of most contemporary civil rights organizations. For example, the MOWM called for a massive grassroots effort to mobilize ordinary people, not just intellectual and political elites. Randolph also perceived the march as an independent action orchestrated by black people that would bar the participation of white people, which represented a departure from the interracial work of many other organizations. Randolph's populist rhetoric and grassroots efforts garnered major support from black people who felt largely ignored by middle class-controlled organizations, such as the NAACP. A week before the march was to begin, on July 1, 1941, a distressed Roosevelt yielded and issued Executive Order #8802, (appendix 2, page 000) establishing the Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC). The order declared, "There shall be no discrimination in the employment of workers in defense industries or government because of race, creed, color, or national origin."³ The order also empowered the FEPC to investigate complaints and take action against employers who continued to discriminate.

In return for the order, Randolph cancelled the march. However, the MOWM quickly became the most militant and important force in African American politics. Its call for nonviolent civil disobedience was unacceptable to mainstream African American organizations, however, and the NAACP withdrew its support of MOWM activities. The hopes of MOWM members that the FEPC would become an independent investigative body were dashed in June 1942 when Roosevelt placed the commission under congressional oversight, and before long the FEPC and the MOWM lost most of their momentum and effectiveness. Randolph found it difficult to secure additional victories on behalf of racial justice between major opposition from government agencies, southern congressmen, and white people who were unwilling to address racial issues during wartime. But at its zenith, between 1941 and 1942, the MOWM had demonstrated unity, power, and the ability of African Americans to engage in direct grassroots politics. It served as the model for the highly celebrated March on Washington in 1963, during which Martin Luther King Jr. gave his famous "I Have a Dream" speech. The militant politics of the MOWM also presaged the black power movement of the late 1960s.

Discrimination on the Frontline and Home Front

The FEPC fostered modest changes to the status quo. The lure of defense industry jobs and the promises of the FEPC triggered an enormous migra-

tion of African Americans from the South to northern defense plants, even if the majority of African Americans employed by these plants held only the most menial of jobs. Some defense industries refused to comply with the order altogether, arguing that simply hiring African Americans would be forcing them to integrate their entire workforce. This proved to be a major problem in the South. Roosevelt's executive order also failed to address racial discrimination within labor unions. The FEPC's rhetoric was eloquent and noble, but the commission had no means to enforce its provisions. In 1943, after learning that some employers were violating the spirit of the new order, Roosevelt decided to strengthen the FEPC. As a result, he increased the FEPC budget to nearly \$500,000 and replaced the part-time Washington DC staff with a professional full-time one that was deployed throughout the nation.

By the end of World War II, black Americans held an unprecedented number of defense jobs. Black civilians occupied 8 percent of defense industry jobs, up from 3 percent on the eve of the war. In addition, two hundred thousand black people were employed by the federal government, tripling prewar numbers. Still, the majority of those employed in the defense industry or by the federal government worked in menial positions.

African Americans had an even more difficult time making progress in the armed forces. Even as black men were once again called upon to make the world safe for democracy, they found themselves consigned to segregated units, restricted to noncombat duties, and denied opportunities to become commissioned officers. In short, the military reflected U.S. society's acceptance of white supremacy.

In 1925 the American War College released the findings of a study that reflected the racism that permeated the armed services. The report argued that black Americans were intellectually inferior, amenable to white supremacy, prone to mob violence, physically unfit for combat, and difficult to command because of an inherent laziness. The War Department accepted the so-called findings uncritically; in 1941 it officially segregated African American soldiers and placed most of them in noncombat units. These actions disregarded the stellar performance of black soldiers in previous wars, as well as the valor shown by black servicemen in the earliest stages of World War II.

Indeed, blacks in military service sacrificed for their country from the very beginning of U.S. engagement in the conflict. On the morning of

December 7, 1941, Doris “Dorie” Miller (1919–1944) (see fig. 1), an African American sailor, was doing laundry aboard the battleship USS *West Virginia* in Pearl Harbor. As “Mess Attendant, second class” Miller gathered the laundry, he heard a loud and urgent summons to battle. Emerging from below deck, he saw Japanese fighter planes attacking U.S. naval forces, the harbor already engulfed in flames. He hurried to an anti-aircraft station, only to find it shattered by a Japanese torpedo. Concerned for his crewmates, Miller pulled the captain and several others to safety under heavy enemy fire. He was an exceptionally strong man, having been a star football player in his hometown of Waco, Texas and a heavy-weight boxing champion in West Virginia. After moving his fellow sailors out of harm’s way, Miller returned to the bridge and commandeered a .50-caliber machine gun, despite having never before fired the weapon. Before the attack had ended he managed to shoot down at least two, and perhaps as many as six, enemy aircraft. “It wasn’t hard,” Miller recalled, “I just pulled the trigger and she worked fine.”⁴ On May 27, 1942, the U.S. Navy honored him for “distinguished devotion to duty, extraordinary courage and disregard for his own personal safety,” and awarded him the Navy Cross. Thereafter, the Navy saw fit to “promote” Miller to “Cook, third class,” moving him from the laundry room to the galley.

Miller’s experience is emblematic of the Jim Crow mindset and policies of the U.S. military early in the war. Military bases offered little sanctuary from Jim Crow and white racism. Many commanding officers banned black newspapers on base, some resorting to burning these papers to isolate black servicemen from their community. African American soldiers were given fewer supplies and inferior food. They lived in the worst areas on base and were refused admission to officers’ clubs, recreational facilities, and stores. Making matters worse, most military training camps were located in the South, where local residents mocked, discriminated against, or outright attacked both on-base and off-base African American soldiers. For these trainees, venturing off base, even in uniform, was taking their lives into their hands.

Many black soldiers who left base encountered life-threatening situations. When Air Corps cadet Lincoln J. Ragsdale drove his parents’ car, a 1940 Buick, off base to a service station in Tuskegee, Alabama, he was followed, forced off the road, and removed from his car by three white police officers. “Blinded by the pitch darkness of a rainy night in Alabama,” Ragsdale remembered, he “heard the cold steel click of a shotgun being



FIG. 1. Admiral Chester W. Nimitz pins the Navy Cross on Dorie Miller, the first Negro to win the award, in a ceremony aboard a warship at Pearl Harbor. © Bettmann/Corbis/AP Images (4206101448).

cocked.”⁵ A police officer shouted, “Let’s get that nigger!” The policemen charged Ragsdale, knocked him down, and beat him within an inch of his life. As one of the officers prepared to fire the shotgun into the body of the overpowered and prone Ragsdale, one of them said, “Naw, let’s just scare him.” The men continued to beat Ragsdale until they grew too tired to continue, leaving him alone by the side of the road, face down in

the mud, beaten, bruised, and frightened. He was hardly the only black soldier, however, to face such abuse. In a “white only” waiting room in a railroad station in Kentucky, three black soldiers were beaten by white civilian policemen for not deferring to white women when ordered to do so. Another African American soldier had his eyes gouged out by a white policeman in an altercation in South Carolina, and a white bus driver in North Carolina was found not guilty of murder after he killed a black soldier following an argument.

Even bodily harm did not top the list of infuriating aspects of black life in a white supremacist army. Perhaps most aggravating was the case of white German prisoners, whom the army treated better than its own black soldiers. Dempsey Travis, a black soldier from Chicago, was shocked to witness “German prisoners free to move around the camp, unlike black soldiers who were restricted. The Germans walked right into the doggone places like any white American. We wearin’ the same uniform, but were excluded.”⁶ African Americans were treated so poorly that when Walter Winchell, the well-known newspaper columnist and radio commentator, asked a young black woman how Adolf Hitler should be punished, she answered “Paint him black and bring him over here.”⁷

The majority of black soldiers were placed in auxiliary units, especially in the engineering and transportation corps. The transportation corps was nearly one-half black, and those who served in it loaded and carried supplies to the front lines. When U.S. forces pushed toward Germany in 1944 and 1945, black soldiers in the transportation corps withstood enemy fire to bring ammunition, fuel, and other essential items to soldiers on the front lines. African American combat units, including highly effective tankers in Europe, distinguished themselves in battle and were a source of pride for black people on the home front. African American engineers built roads, erected camps, and constructed ports. Black soldiers worked hard at and excelled in these duties because they truly wished to serve their country, yet they were subjected to unfair and often brutal discipline. In Europe, for instance, African American soldiers were executed in far greater numbers than white soldiers, despite the fact that black Americans constituted only 10 percent of all U.S. troops.

This type of treatment was also present in the Navy. One example is the treatment of African American soldiers at its Port Chicago base north of San Francisco. On July 17, 1944, munitions being loaded for transport to the Pacific theater exploded, killing 320 American sailors, 202 of whom

were black. Following the incident, 328 of the surviving black soldiers stationed at the port were ordered to relocate to another ship to again load ammunition, of whom 258 protested and were summarily arrested. Around 50 of the dissenting soldiers were named as organizers of what became known as the “Port Chicago Mutiny.” The men were charged with mutiny, convicted, and sentenced to prison terms as long as fifteen years, despite a brief filed in their defense by Thurgood Marshall, a young attorney for the NAACP.

Discontent was particularly intense among black military personnel in the Southwest. On Thanksgiving night, in 1942, in a café in Phoenix, Arizona, a black soldier from the 364th Infantry Regiment, who was stationed at the nearby Papago Park Army base, struck a black woman over the head with a bottle during a dispute. When white military policemen attempted to arrest the soldier, he brandished a knife and fought back vigorously. When the military policeman hurt the soldier after firing upon him, black servicemen in the café erupted in angry disapproval and broke ranks. Military policemen soon rounded up about one hundred and fifty random black soldiers, most of whom had nothing to do with the incident, and returned them to Papago Park. Buses were secured to transport the group. Before the groups boarded the buses, however, a jeep full of armed blacks, including soldiers and civilians, descended upon the area. The black soldiers became inflamed and broke rank. A “lone shot from somewhere” was fired, according to accounts; the source of the shot was never determined, but it ignited a riot. “This does it,” one observer shouted, “now all hell will pop.” The soldiers ran in all directions as handguns, rifles, and high-caliber automatic weapons furiously “snapped and barked.” A “hunt” for everyone who fled the scene ensued.⁸

Phoenix’s law enforcement authorities summoned all available police officers, ordering them to join the military police in apprehending the suspects. Twenty-eight blocks were cordoned off and searched. Several of the “hunted” soldiers hid in the homes of friends in the area. To “flush them out,” the military police drove armored personnel carriers through the streets. An anonymous observer later recalled, “They’d roll up in front of these homes and with the loudspeaker they had on these vehicles, they’d call on him to surrender. If he didn’t come out, they’d start potting the house with these fifty-caliber machine guns that just made a hole you could stick your fist through.”⁹ Before the tumultuous ordeal ended, three men died and eleven were wounded. Most of the men arrested and jailed

were soon released, but some of those who bore arms during the riot were eventually court-martialed and sent to military prisons.

Disturbances occurred at other military bases in the Southwest as well, including Fort Huachuca, a military installation in the Southern Arizona desert. During the late nineteenth century, Fort Huachuca had been home to the all-black 9th and 10th Cavalries, the Buffalo Soldiers. During World War II, the fort housed the largest concentration of black soldiers in the nation, particularly after the army elected, in 1942, to establish the U.S. 93rd Infantry Division by combining the 25th, 368th, and 369th regiments with various field companies and battalions. The Buffalo Soldiers had been led by white officers; the 93rd, however, had nearly three hundred black officers. By December 1942, the 32nd and 33rd companies of the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps (WAAC) joined the men of the 93rd in the Sonoran desert (see fig. 2). These women served as postal clerks, stenographers, switchboard operators, truck drivers, and typists, freeing the men from these duties so they could train for combat. Despite their numbers and myriad duties, however, all black soldiers at Fort Huachuca were subjected to harassment and racial discrimination from white superiors. In 1942, black soldiers stationed at the fort protested after Arizona governor Sidney P. Osborn requested the Army's help in picking Arizona's long-staple cotton due to a farm labor shortage in the state. "I am sure there are many thousands of experienced cotton pickers at Huachuca," Osborne declared, "and I am sure that they could be put at nothing more necessary, essential or vital at this particular moment than aiding in the harvesting of this crop." African American soldiers at the fort reported the slight to the NAACP and the black press. Osborne defended his request as benign. The protests were heard, however, and the Army eventually postponed any plans to use troops in the cotton fields. Black soldiers were ridiculed and discriminated against for their stance, nonetheless, which aggravated racial tensions on the base.¹⁰

Gravely unhappy with the treatment of African American servicemen and servicewomen, William Hastie, the first African American judge of a federal District Court (Virgin Islands) and dean of the Howard University School of Law, A. Philip Randolph, Walter White, T. Arnold Hill, Lester Granger, Adam Clayton Powell Jr., Robert Vann, Mabel K. Staupers, and other prominent civil rights advocates organized black workers, women's groups, students, and interracial alliances to counter and upend discrimination in the military. They pushed the federal government and



FIG. 2. Maj. Charity E. Adams and Capt. Abbie N. Campbell inspect the first contingent of black members of the Women's Army Corps assigned to overseas duty, England, 1945. National Archives and Records Administration.

the military to address racial inequality at a time when both institutions were keenly interested in putting forth a unified face for the world to see.

Black Americans not only questioned their role in World War II, but they also tended to view Nazism and European imperialism in the same light as white supremacy in the United States. As historian Nell Irvin Painter has noted, columnist George Schuyler, writing for the *Pittsburgh Courier*, “likened German expansion in Europe to British colonialism in Africa.” He argued that black Americans had no place in this conflict, asking, “Why should Negroes fight for democracy abroad when they were refused democracy in every American activity except tax paying?”¹¹ Dizzy Gillespie, the famous bebop trumpeter, responded to a summons by his local draft board by reminding the panel that he did not know what a German looked like, and was uncertain as to whom he would point his gun at if he were in battle:

“In this stage of my life here in the United States whose foot,” he queried rhetorically, “has not been in my ass?” At the same time, a play in New York City had a black soldier proclaim he would “fight Hitler, Musso-

lini, and the Japs all at the same time, but I'm telling you I'll give those crackers down South the same damn medicine." A black observer in North Carolina claimed, "No clear thinking Negro can long afford to ignore the Hitlers here in America."¹²

Many black activists sought to support African American troops by challenging their mistreatment by the federal government. In 1942, Randolph suggested that a national campaign of civil disobedience might be required to dramatize the plight of black Americans fighting battles for freedom on multiple fronts at home and abroad. He cautioned his fellow blacks not to sublimate the needs of African American communities to those of the nation; he wanted all black people to disregard the advice that W. E. B. Du Bois had issued to rally African American support for World War II.

Du Bois, a Harvard educated scholar, activist, and cofounder of the NAACP, had called upon blacks to fight for equal rights, the right to vote, and opportunities for higher learning. Racial parity, he argued, would only come through political organization, resistance, and protest. Anything less, he reasoned, confined African Americans to subservience and poverty. Du Bois encouraged African Americans to enlist and fight during World War I to "make the world safe for democracy." "Let, us, while this war lasts," he wrote, "forget our special grievances [with American racism] and close our ranks."¹³

Activists, such as Randolph, rejected Du Bois's call to arms in World War I and in World War II. "Negroes made the blunder of closing ranks and forgetting their grievances in the last war," Randolph stated. "We are resolved that we will not make that blunder again." Du Bois never questioned his own leadership during World War II, but he did admit that the so-called Great War "did not bring us democracy." Right after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Du Bois reminded black people that progress would only arise through struggle: "We close ranks again but only, now as then, to fight for democracy, not democracy for white folks but for yellow, brown and black."¹⁴ Although few blacks shared Du Bois's transnational and transracial vision of democracy, many did contemplate the conflict's effects on Africans and Asians.

The federal government grew particularly sensitive to any type of black resistance to the war effort, and it came down hard on anyone suspected of disloyalty. In 1942, a Red Scare-like crackdown by the Federal Bureau

of Investigation (FBI) arrested more than eighty black critics of the military draft and the war. Among those arrested were leaders of the Nation of Islam (NOI), who had publicly refused to submit to the draft and fight in what they called a “white man’s war.” NOI leader Elijah Muhammad and many of his followers languished in prison for three years. In 1943, Bayard Rustin, a black activist and advocate of passive resistance who collaborated with Randolph on the MOWM, was arrested and sentenced to three years in prison when he failed to submit to induction.

Such threats did not deter prominent African Americans from protesting racism. Black movie star Lena Horne stopped one of her performances at Fort Riley, Kansas when she noticed German prisoners of war seated in the front rows and black American soldiers in the back, where they had been segregated by force. Horne left the stage, walked to the back of the hall, and sang directly to the black soldiers, to the consternation of white military personnel. African American soldiers also resisted second-class treatment. Jackie Robinson, a second lieutenant in the U.S. Army and a former star athlete at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), was court-martialed, although eventually acquitted, for refusing to sit in the back of a segregated bus near Camp Hood (now Fort Hood), Texas in 1944. Although President Roosevelt had issued Executive Order #8802 back in 1941, racism in the armed forces persisted throughout the war. African American media and leftist organizations released myriad reports of black soldiers fighting racial prejudice at military installations across the nation.

African American Women

In 1942, the *Crisis*, the primary organ of the NAACP, noted:

[T]he colored woman has been a more potent factor in shaping Negro society than the white woman has been in shaping white society because the sexual caste system has been more fluid and ill-defined than among whites. Colored women have worked with their men and helped build and maintain every institution we have. Without their economic aid and counsel we would have made little if any progress.¹⁵

Black women played a critical role in protesting the U.S. military’s racist policies and in opening up the armed services for black female participation. Their agitation led to their admittance into the Women’s Auxiliary Corps, created as an extension of the armed services during the initial

stages of the war. African American women's critical role in the military during World War II stood in stark contrast to the all-male military of preceding wars and conflicts and set the stage for the permanent involvement of black women in the nation's services.

Perhaps the most significant step forward for black women at the time was the trailblazing work of Mabel K. Staupers (1890–1989), who served as executive director of the National Association of Colored Graduate Nurses (NACGN). Staupers led the NACGN in a successful fight to end the quota system in the U.S. Army Nurse Corps. Despite the fact that many African American nurses volunteered to serve during World War II, the Army observed a strict quota and only admitted a very small number of African American women; the Navy rejected them altogether. Bold and determined, Staupers denounced these policies as discriminatory, and in November of 1944, she took her case directly to Eleanor Roosevelt. She explained to the First Lady that 82 black nurses were serving a mere 150 patients at Fort Huachuca, Arizona, at a time when the Army faced an acute nursing shortage and was considering the institution of a draft of white nurses. Even more insulting to Staupers were the instances in which black nurses were tasked to care for German prisoners of war at a higher percentage than white nurses. Staupers considered this situation unacceptable and an insult to the patriotism of black women. “When our women hear of the great need for nurses in the Army and when they enter the service,” she stated, “it is with the high hopes that they will be used to nurse sick and wounded soldiers who are fighting our country’s enemies and not primarily to take care of these enemies.”¹⁶

Early in 1945, Staupers, the NACGN, and female nurses of all races responded to the War Department’s claim of a continued shortage of nurses by protesting the exclusion and discriminatory treatment of black nurses in the Army and Navy Nurse Corps. Public support for their efforts to eliminate quotas was strong, as American citizens soon showered the War Department with correspondence condemning quotas and similar prohibitions. Quickly succumbing to this pressure in January of 1945, the Army and Navy desegregated the Nurse Corps of their respective branches and revised military policies to forbid discrimination on the basis of race. Shortly after this landmark policy change, Phyllis Daley became the first black woman accepted into the Navy Nurse Corps. More than three hundred African American women would ultimately serve in the Army Nurse Corps during World War II.

The Tuskegee Airmen

The military soon opened new doors to black men as well. By 1944 the Navy reluctantly began training black men as officers. Likewise, the Army gradually opened officer-training schools for black men and women. But the most impressive and celebrated example of the wartime history of black military advancement and resistance to white supremacy is the formation of the Army Air Corps flight school at Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. Many white people continued to believe that black people were not intelligent enough to operate technologically sophisticated machines, and certainly not airplanes. Despite the military establishment's lingering opposition to black people rising to the status of officer, factors such as the daring acts of early-twentieth-century pilots Bessie Coleman and Hubert Julian, pressure by black leaders, and the urgency of war finally led to the establishment of an all-black flight-officer training school in 1941. It was located at the predominantly black Tuskegee Institute, which had been founded on July 4, 1881 by Booker T. Washington, celebrated nineteenth-century African American champion of industrial education, self-sufficiency, and entrepreneurship. Capitalizing on the school's segregated yet established aeronautical engineering program, the Army Air Corps created the flight school, Tuskegee Army Airfield, for black men only.

At a time when African American men were believed, by most, to lack intelligence, skill, courage, and patriotism, the Tuskegee Airmen became America's first black military airmen. These men came from every section of the country, with large numbers coming from New York, Washington DC, Los Angeles, Chicago, Philadelphia, and Detroit. Each possessed a strong desire to serve the United States and show his quality. Most were college graduates or undergraduates. Others displayed their academic qualifications through comprehensive entrance examinations. Those who demonstrated intellectual acumen and physical strength were accepted as aviation cadets, trained initially as single-engine pilots, and later trained as twin-engine pilots, navigators, or bombardiers.

The first class of thirteen flying cadets of the 99th Pursuit Squadron began its training at Tuskegee on July 19, 1941. Cadets at Tuskegee received a grueling and rigorous education as they prepared for combat; they also endured the frustrations of being black in a training locale heavily populated by southern white officers who possessed deep-seated notions of white supremacy. As a consequence, most cadets "washed out," or dropped out, before graduation. Dogged by the physical and mental rigors of their

training, intense competition, and institutional racism, successful cadets had to be intellectually formidable, strong communicators, and remarkably resilient.

Most of the cadets who “washed out” simply could not handle the intense psychological stress associated with their service and training and were not already oriented to military discipline or the intensity of military drilling. Those cadets from the North, particularly, clashed with abusive white southern officers. Some enlisted men, such as cadet Jimmy Moore, also succumbed to the constant abuse. Throughout most of his training, Moore patiently endured the harsh environment of the flight school. Then, just one day before his graduation, he “snapped,” lashing out verbally at a white superior officer who had just hit him with a barrage of racial slurs. This incident abruptly ended Moore’s military career.

The first class of Tuskegee cadets produced five graduates in March 1942: Captain Benjamin O. Davis Jr., George S. Roberts, Lemuel Custis, Charles De Bow, and Mac Ross. Davis Jr., the first black graduate of West Point in the twentieth century, was the son of Benjamin O. Davis Sr., the only senior black officer in the Army, who had become a brigadier general in 1941. Between March and September of 1942, thirty-three pilots received their wings. They were soon followed by additional officers eager to see action. These men quickly demonstrated their loyalty to their country and their ability to perform at the highest levels their training allowed. Dubbed the “Lonely Eagles” by the black press because of their small numbers and segregated status and “Red Tails” for the distinctive markings on their planes, these combat pilots came to be known by the entire nation as the “Tuskegee Airmen” (see fig. 3).

Once given the opportunity to fight, the Tuskegee Airmen proved themselves to be proficient in battle. The 99th Pursuit Squadron, which became the 332nd Fighter Group, was deployed in April 1943 to North Africa, where it flew its first combat mission against Italian and German forces on the island of Pantelleria on June 2, 1943. Davis Jr., who had been promoted to the rank of colonel, was placed in command of the 332nd Group when it was dispatched to Italy in January 1944. Davis Jr., like his father, would later rise to the rank of brigadier general. The Tuskegee fighters’ duties included escorting bombers and participating in many other missions. The 332nd was instrumental in sinking an enemy destroyer in the Adriatic Sea, and it also protected the 15th Air Force bombers as they attacked strategically critical oil fields in Rumania (modern Romania).



FIG. 3. Tuskegee Airmen at the Negro Training Center examine a map before taking off in a biplane for a training exercise. *Left to right*: Lt. John Daniels of Chicago, Cadet Clayborne Lockett of Los Angeles, Cadet Lawrence O'Clark of Chicago, Cadet William Melton of Los Angeles, and civilian instructor Milton Crenshaw of Little Rock. © Bettmann/Corbis/AP Images (110928085577).

Under the command of Davis Jr., the fighter group won the admiration of African Americans throughout the United States and the respect of many officials in the Air Corps.

The Tuskegee Airmen flew more than 15,500 sorties and completed 1,578 missions. The 332nd demonstrated their impressive skill again as they escorted heavy bombers into Germany's Rhineland in two hundred separate missions without losing one fighter to enemy fire. It destroyed 409 enemy aircraft, sank 1 enemy destroyer, and eliminated myriad ground installations with strafing runs. On January 27, 1944, the 99th, commanded by William W. Momyer, shot down 5 enemy aircraft in less than four minutes, despite being outnumbered nearly two to one. In recognition of their service to their country, the Tuskegee Airmen collected 150 distinguished Flying Crosses, 1 Legion of Merit, 1 Silver Star, 14 Bronze Stars, and 744 Air Medals.

A New Identity Forged in Battle

The Tuskegee Airmen were in good company. Nearly half a million other African American soldiers also distinguished themselves overseas. The 761st Tank Battalion, which served in six European nations and fought in the 1944 German counteroffensive known as the Battle of the Bulge, was cited for its courage under enemy fire. By the end of the war, many such units were given presidential citations for their role in the Allied victory. Furthermore, three African Americans earned the Navy Cross and eighty received the Distinguished Flying Cross. The success of the Tuskegee Airmen and their fellow black troops so impressed a military advisory board that its members recommended in 1944 that the armed services discard the general policy of withholding black soldiers from battle. During the final months of the European war, Allied Supreme Commander Dwight D. Eisenhower authorized an “experimental” departure from the military’s segregationist policy when he permitted nearly forty black soldiers to serve as replacements in white units that had suffered heavy losses. In addition, 2,500 black volunteers were allowed to serve in platoons assigned to predominantly white infantry units. In a subsequent study of this experiment, white officers reported that the black troops performed “very well” in combat; unfortunately, top military officials at the time disparaged the study’s conclusions and prevented its release to the public.

As a result of their participation in the war, many African Americans developed a renewed sense of self-esteem and devotion to the struggle for racial equality and black liberation. They were better educated than their predecessors in World War I, and more of them had entered the service with “radical” ideas of racial equality. They were self-assured and tended to compromise less than earlier generations of black soldiers. Sociologists St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton commented on this transformation, explaining:

At least half of the Negro soldiers who fall into this class were city people who had lived through a Depression in America’s Black Ghettos, and who had been exposed to unions, the Communist movement, and to the moods of racial radicalism that occasionally swept American cities. Even the rural southern Negroes were different this time, for the thirty years between the First and Second World War has seen a great expansion of school facilities in the South and distribution of newspapers and radios.¹⁷

Lincoln Ragsdale, one veteran of World War II, believed that it was his “Tuskegee experience” that emboldened him and gave him direction. “It gave me a whole new self-image,” he maintained. He “remembered when we [Tuskegee Airmen] used to walk through black neighborhoods right after the war, and little kids would run up to us and touch our uniforms. ‘Mister, can you really fly an airplane’ they’d ask. The Tuskegee airmen gave blacks a reason to be proud.”¹⁸ Their service also gave the 2.5 million black veterans of World War II incentive to believe that they could achieve much more in their communities and the nation.

On the Home Front: A New Resolve, Migration, and Labor

African Americans fought for democracy and racial equality on the home front as well. The war fundamentally changed the consciousness of the nation’s black community. Black laborers and volunteers produced goods and purchased bonds for the war effort, while transformations engendered by the war created new problems and aggravated old ones. At times, this volatile mix of unprecedented change and trouble erupted into violence in cities throughout the United States. Protest groups, African American leaders, and the black press fought employment discrimination, political exclusion, and segregation for the duration of the war.

The fight to preserve democracy abroad deeply affected black communities, even shifting their regions of residence. The war most significantly altered the African American West, as black people flocked to the region seeking jobs in desegregated military industries such as shipyards and munitions factories. Other African Americans first came west upon their assignment to western military bases. During the 1940s, the West’s black population grew by 443,000, or 33 percent. The largest urban areas of the region hosted increases in the African American population, ranging from 168 percent in the city of Los Angeles to an incredible 798 percent in San Francisco. Increases were not as striking in the Hawaiian Islands and the Southwest, but cities in both regions also witnessed rising black populations. The number of black Phoenicians surged from 4,263 in 1940 to 5,217 in 1950. These growing populations ushered in social, economic, and political change. The majority of the black migrants of this decade hailed from Oklahoma, Texas, Louisiana, and Arkansas. Fifty-three percent of the migrants were women, most of whom were married. The rise of the black population in the West, and a smaller rise in the North, mirrored a reduction of the black southern population, which fell from 77

percent in 1940 to 68 percent by 1950. The most significant rise in a single area's African American population occurred in Southern California, where the aeronautical industry, the hard work of protest groups, and the federal government's enforcement of antidiscrimination labor statutes all helped the black community of greater Los Angeles (city and suburban municipalities) grow by 340,000 during World War II.¹⁹

Nevertheless, before and after the war, the majority white population in the American West expected African Americans to remain socioeconomically subordinate. White supremacy and Jim Crow were, unfortunately, alive and well in Southwestern cities such as Phoenix, where race relations, if they were not as rigid, volatile, and capricious, still resembled those in the South.

African American migrants brought to the West a less conciliatory approach to racism than had previously existed in the west, and also a desire for positive change. Pressure from black activists, for example, pushed the California legislature to consider bills that would outlaw racial discrimination in workplaces and public accommodation by 1943. In Denver, black protesters eliminated legal segregation in theaters. Victories over job discrimination and Jim Crow were more elusive in the Southwest, however. In Phoenix, for example, segregation endured. Still, the prospect of good jobs and dreams of a freer life increased the black western population tenfold and intensified the region's burgeoning civil rights movement.

The war also quickened the migration of black people from rural to urban areas in the South and North. Despite an improving farm economy, the lure of high-paying defense jobs, as well as the accoutrements of urban life, prompted many black farmers to relocate. Moreover, recent advances in global competition and agricultural technology greatly diminished the need for black laborers in many rural areas. By the end of the war, a mere 28 percent of black men worked on farms, which constituted a reduction of 13 percent since 1940 alone. Wartime needs and government pressures had prompted industry to hire more black workers in urban areas, creating additional reasons to migrate. The number of African American workers in nonagricultural jobs rose from 2.9 million to 3.8 million during the war, as thousands of black people secured jobs not previously available to them. With so many black men in the military, new employment opportunities particularly benefited black women, who took positions outside the purview of domestic work in unprecedented numbers. Across the nation six

hundred thousand black women, of whom four hundred thousand were former servants, transitioned into industrial work.

Organized labor also became more welcoming to blacks during the war. African American union membership increased from 200,000 to 1.25 million between 1940 and 1945. Unions affiliated with the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), chiefly the United Automobile Workers (UAW), were particularly open to accepting black workers. AFL affiliates, however, continued to refuse admission to African Americans. Greater involvement in unions, although it was not without problems, helped black Americans establish significant networks that would aid in their fight against lingering racial discrimination in the workplace.

As they had in the past, African American leaders looked to the federal government for support in their battle against racial inequality. Randolph and his supporters were disappointed with the ineffectiveness of the FEPC during the early stages of the war. Randolph urged the MOWM to respond with plans for another protest. Once again, President Roosevelt avoided a public confrontation by issuing Executive Order #9346 in May 1943. In several important ways, this order built upon the foundation laid by Executive Order #8802. Executive Order #9346 placed the FEPC within the Office of Emergency Management (OEM), forerunner of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), and the OEM was beholden only to Roosevelt in his office as President. The order itself required that (a) all government contracts, and not simply military contracts, include a nondiscrimination clause, and that (b) the number of FEPC committee members and their salaries be increased. Roosevelt appointed Malcolm Ross, a fiery white liberal, to chair the committee. Ross presided over hearings for cases involving allegations of discrimination in a wide range of industries, but especially in railroads and shipping. The hearings were fairly successful. Between 1943 and 1946, more than fourteen thousand complaints were filed with the FEPC, of which more than five thousand were resolved successfully. The committee encountered staunch resistance, however, particularly in the South. In some cases, it was not uncommon for the FEPC to acquiesce to long-established southern racial mores regarding the treatment of laborers.

Randolph and his contemporaries were not the only people fighting for African Americans at this time. The war years witnessed the emergence of an increasing number of younger black activists who embraced and developed more direct methods to challenge racial injustice. In 1942, Pauli

Murray joined the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR), an international pacifist group founded in 1914. That year, the FOR unveiled its nonviolent methods on the campus of Howard University, which Murray attended as a law student. She knew that black FOR members were studying and incorporating the strategies of Mahatma Gandhi to confront racial segregation. James Farmer, an alumnus of Howard's school of religion and the FOR's "race relations secretary," united the organization in 1943 with an interracial group of activists in Chicago to found the Committee of Racial Equality (CRE). Murray also developed a close relationship with Bayard Rustin, also of the FOR. Like Murray, Rustin was a veteran of the leftist activism of the Great Depression era. After becoming disillusioned with the Young Communist League, to which he had previously belonged, Rustin looked to the FOR as his political activist outlet. Murray and Rustin were also intimately aware of the stigma, trauma, and frustration associated with discrimination on several inextricably linked fronts. Murray experienced bigotry as an African American and as a woman, whereas Rustin was victimized as a black man and a homosexual during an era when homophobia was not acknowledged, let alone confronted.

Murray's activism and devotion to Gandhian principles were soon tested. In June 1944, Howard students protested the arrest of three black female students who had refused to leave a lunch counter at an all-white café adjacent to campus. Murray served as an unofficial legal advisor for the students as they considered the legal ramifications of their civil disobedience and the legal options available to the arrested students. Eventually the students were released on bail, and the charges were dropped as a result of Murray's representation and mounting pressure from the black community. During the spring of 1943 she also participated in a student protest of the Little Palace Cafeteria near Howard, marching alongside picketers who bore signs that read; "We Die Together, Why Can't We Eat Together?" Protestors made their way into the diner; when they were refused service, they took their empty trays, sat down in open seats, and read their school books. The students staged these famous "sit-downs," which foreshadowed the "sit-ins" of the 1960s, for three days. On the final day, the owner of the restaurant relented and permitted black people to eat at his establishment. Murray recalled feeling "jubilant" after their victory. She believed that the protest "proved that intelligent, imaginative action could bring positive results." She also noted that twelve of the nineteen protestors were black women. "We women," she stated, "reasoned that it

was our job to help make the country for which our black brothers were fighting a freer place in which to live when they returned from wartime services.”²⁰

Racial friction remained high during the war, and some tensions were not eased through nonviolent civil disobedience. Indeed, the eruption of racial violence in numerous cities nationwide during the summer of 1943 quickly muted the optimism that Murray felt following her successful protest against white supremacy in Washington DC. One of the most violent and deadly race riots in U.S. history unfolded in Detroit that summer. Murray argued that “few Negroes were surprised” by the explosion of violence, as “the racial tension that produced it had been building steadily throughout the war.”²¹

The unrest in Detroit emerged from a unique context. During the war the city’s highly productive factories churned out everything from tanks to airplanes. Detroit’s booming industry attracted fifty thousand black Americans between 1942 and 1950. Overcrowding in the city’s neighborhoods and fierce competition for jobs and resources undermined the hope for interracial coalition building fostered by the integrated CIO. Thousands of white UAW members walked out of a factory to protest the promotion of eight black workers, all of whom were also members of the UAW. Similarly, employers at the Packard plant organized a “hate strike” in opposition to the hiring of three black women as drill operators. In addition, three African American families tried to move into the federally funded, all-white Sojourner Truth Housing Project in Detroit in February 1942, only to be greeted by an angry mob of white people, comprising young and old, male and female. Many members of the mob wielded guns, knives, or bats. The white mob attacked the black families and any African American they could find in the area. Black residents fought back with guns, knives, and any weapons they could get their hands on. Some seventeen hundred National Guardsmen were summoned to reestablish order. The threat of more violence, however, engulfed the city, prompting city leaders to assure white residents that future housing projects would adhere to established racial demographics of area neighborhoods, so as not to introduce more African Americans into white communities. This procedure was quickly implemented in cities across the nation to preserve de facto and de jure residential segregation.

Back in Detroit, frustration again boiled over into outright violence. On June 20, 1943, a riot ensued after a fist fight broke out between a

black man and a white man at the sprawling Belle Isle Amusement Park along the banks of the Detroit River. The fight quickly escalated into a melee between warring factions of blacks and whites, and spilled into the city. The rioters looted and burned buildings, most of them in and around Paradise Valley, one of the oldest and poorest neighborhoods in Detroit. As the violence intensified, blacks dragged whites out of cars and destroyed white-owned shops in Paradise Valley, while whites overturned and burned black-owned automobiles and assaulted blacks on streetcars and in major intersections. The predominantly white Detroit police did little to stop the bloodshed. In fact, many police officers joined white rioters in attacking blacks, including those attempting to flee the carnage.

The Detroit riot of 1943 ended only after President Roosevelt, at the request of Mayor Edward Jeffries Jr., ordered six thousand federal troops to enter and occupy the city on June 21, by which time twenty-five blacks and nine whites lay dead. Perhaps most disturbingly, of the twenty-five African Americans who perished, seventeen died at the hands of the police. Detroit law enforcement argued that the shootings were justified because the victims had been caught looting stores. In remarkable contrast, none of the whites who died were killed by the police. Some seven hundred people were injured in the violence, and the city suffered upward of \$2 million in property damage. Many white residents of Detroit blamed the riot on the black press and the NAACP, arguing that black Detroiters had pushed too hard for economic and political equality and had been unduly influenced by communist agitators. Conversely, black leaders, leftist trade unionists, other racial and ethnic groups, and Jewish organizations blamed the riot on a plethora of white supremacist groups and terrorist outfits, such as the Black Dragon Society, the KKK, the Christian Front, the Knights of the White Camelia, the National Workers Leagues, and the Southern Voters League.

Although African American leaders were unified in their denunciation of the violence in Detroit and the racism that spawned the riot, they increasingly disagreed on how they should proceed to confront racial injustice. The NAACP, whose numbers swelled from 50,000 in 1940 to 450,000 by 1945, benefited greatly from the “Double V” campaign and the far reach of the *Crisis*. Dissension existed in the ranks, however. Members argued over the merits of integration versus black nationalism or self-segregation. Some black people also questioned the efficacy of mounting legal challenges to segregation on behalf of job applicants, students, and the

middle class and urged NAACP leadership to turn their attention to poor and working-class African Americans instead. The newer civil rights organizations beckoned younger, more militant blacks, persons attracted by the new groups' strategy of direct action against white supremacy. Meanwhile, existing organizations retooled. In 1944, southern white liberals united with black people to forge the Southern Regional Council (SRC). Initially founded in 1919 as the Commission on Interracial Cooperation, the reconstituted SRC immediately declared its intention to combat "the intractable issue of racial injustice in the South." The interracial SRC fought against lynchings, stereotypical black roles in Hollywood, and other issues "most important to race and democracy." The SRC published academic works focusing on race and racism, and challenged racial injustice in the media. The most vociferous group to emerge during this era, however, was an offshoot of the CRE, the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE).

As an interracial group of activists in Chicago founded the Committee of Racial Equality (CRE) at Howard University, some in the newly created CRE also worked to establish a national civil rights organization. That vision jelled in the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) founded in 1942 by Bernice Fisher, James R. Robinson, Joe Guinn, George Houser, Homer Jack, and James Farmer. Many of these students, including Farmer, were members of the Chicago branch of the FOR. Like those who created FOR, CORE's founders were deeply influenced by the nonviolent resistance teachings of Gandhi. CORE began as a "non-hierarchical, decentralized organization funded entirely by the voluntary contributions of its members."²² Farmer and George Houser, a white University of Chicago student, served as the organization's first leaders.

CORE members worked to challenge racial inequality. Initially the organization protested segregation in public accommodations. Farmer traveled to states in the Midwest with Bayard Rustin, who was serving as FOR's field secretary and primary recruitment officer. Farmer and Rustin successfully recruited many white college students, primarily from the Midwest. Despite the quick growth of the organization, CORE did not present a unified front to the nation, for its officers and members believed that bringing local chapters under national control would contradict their opposition to hierarchy. The lack of centralized national leadership, however, resulted in ideological differences among chapters. For example, some chapters embraced pacifism whereas others sought out opportunities for direct action. This tension permeated CORE throughout its early existence.

Nevertheless, over time, CORE successfully integrated some places of public accommodation in the North and South by engaging in nonviolent sit-ins and pickets. As CORE continued to grow, its membership decided they needed an energetic leader to link the goals and tactics of local chapters with a unified national agenda: Farmer was elected the organization's National Director in 1953.

Seeking to end racial discrimination, white and black people established other new organizations throughout the United States. In 1943 activists of various racial and ethnic backgrounds in Los Angeles established the Council on Civic Unity, which championed interracial understanding and contested racial injustice. The Los Angeles-based group was duplicated in several western cities. In Arizona, for example, a similar organization was founded in the late 1940s.

African Americans' various approaches to the race problem were as heterogeneous as black people themselves. Black women founded political councils and protest organizations in African American neighborhoods throughout the South and Midwest to aid in efforts to fight racial segregation. Other African American women addressed injustice through their art and literary works. Still others, such as Rosa Parks, an active member of the Montgomery, Alabama NAACP during the 1940s, and Ella Baker, the NAACP's national field secretary during the same period, would go on to become revered civil rights leaders during the 1950s and 1960s.

African American students, especially those who attended predominantly black colleges, began to protest the segregated environments of their cities and towns on a regular basis. The protest led by Murray and FOR in 1943 helped ignite a groundswell of student insurgency that reverberated for the next two decades. The reach of Murray's work extended as far west as Phoenix, where sixteen-year-old Opal Ellis, a black female student at Phoenix's segregated George Washington Carver School and a member of the local NAACP's Youth Auxiliary, led a sit-in at the city's segregated Woolworth's store, one of the first sit-ins west of the Mississippi River.

Yet as World War II came to a close, an expanding and more dynamic movement for racial justice was tempered by the staggering reality of demobilization. Ultimately, the Double V campaign proved to be bittersweet: sweet because African Americans had made many socioeconomic advances, but bitter because, despite these gains, African Americans remained subjected to economic oppression and segregation in schools, places of public accommodation, and residential areas across the nation.

Following the surrender of Germany and then Japan in 1945, the United States shifted from war mobilization to peacetime demobilization. Many of the inroads that black people had made during the war were erased when soldiers were discharged and factories returned to their prewar discriminatory practices. By 1945, however, things had changed. No longer would African Americans accept second-class citizenship. Instead, black people stood poised and ready to fight, willing to adopt new strategies for advancement in the postwar world.

African Americans and the Cold War

The relationship between the United States and the international community remained complicated well after the war ended. In 1945 the United Nations, formed in San Francisco in June of that year, began to shape the postwar world. Before long, the diverging interests of the world's new "superpowers," the United States and the Soviet Union, developed into a decades-long period of disagreement and hostility known as the Cold War. These two nations could not reconcile their ideological differences regarding religious beliefs, individual rights, and human rights. The United States was an unapologetic capitalist society built upon the notion of individual freedom and democracy, whereas the Soviet Union was a communist nation forged by principles of collectivism and social control. The defeat of the German and Japanese empires created large vacuums of power that both America and Russia sought to fill. Simultaneously, the destruction of Western Europe and the inability of its nations to retain their colonial possessions in Asia, Africa, and Latin America led to revolutions that created newly independent nations that both superpowers hoped to influence, if not to control outright. The Cold War world, therefore, was an unpredictable and volatile world in which global tensions framed domestic and foreign policy.

American leaders followed a policy of "containment," an attempt to stop the spread of the Soviet Union's power and communist ideology. In 1949, the United States played a key role in founding the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), which it hoped would serve to offset Soviet power in Eastern Europe while simultaneously shielding Western Europe as these nations rebuilt from the devastation of war. When Asian and African countries secured their independence from occupation and colonial rule during the 1950s and 1960s, the United States fought to restrict Soviet influence on these new nations as well. The American government exe-

cuted this agenda through the auspices of the Marshall Plan (1941–1947), a financial and humanitarian effort aimed at creating a stronger economic and social foundation for European countries. It also sought to stabilize Western Europe, Japan, and the newly independent nations through secret operations carried out by the recently created Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and through military force.

Throughout the Cold War, America generated state-sponsored propaganda that attempted to persuade the so-called Third World that the United States was, indeed, an exemplar state to follow and befriend. The Cold War influenced the worldview of all Americans at this time. At the same time, the launch of the most productive stage of the long struggle for civil rights challenged the nation to finally fulfill its promises of freedom and democracy to all its citizens. Indeed, the connections between the Cold War and the civil rights movement are profound. The United States was so wrapped up in promoting its self-image of a bastion of unfettered freedom, under siege by evil communists abroad and recalcitrant black people at home, that it created an atmosphere of paranoia (McCarthyism, a subset of the Red Scare). Meanwhile, its treatment of African Americans undercut its own ideals and its efforts to present itself as a beacon of democracy.

The Cold War also coincided with the rise of the U.S. military-industrial complex, which established the United States as the most powerful military state in the world. The federal government maintained this new massive power through the direct employment of millions of Americans and appropriations that covered an unprecedented number of government contracts to construction companies and weapons manufacturers. This expansion in the size and budget of the federal government resulted in a shift of regional power. In particular, the power that southern politicians held over the national government weakened, which also led to a decline in the control that these politicians wielded over national race relations. By virtue of the sheer numbers of people of color who resided in emerging nations in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, American foreign policymakers were now compelled to be mindful in their dealings with regard to race and culture, both at home and abroad. Indeed, some foreign nations viewed the exploitation of African Americans as an indication that the U.S. government was not, in fact, the bastion of freedom it claimed to be. To make a case for communism and elevate its status in the world, the Soviet Union loudly questioned America's commitment

to freedom and democracy, eager to draw attention to the unjust ways in which the United States treated its citizens of color. Therefore, throughout the Cold War, pressures from abroad fortified movements to advance the cause of civil and human rights within the United States.

In this way, the Cold War provided black leaders with opportunities to comment on international affairs. W. E. B. Du Bois and Ralph Bunche, for example, offered divergent perspectives on the role that the United States should play during the period. Du Bois had long believed that the destinies of Africans and African Americans were inextricably linked. By 1945, many people considered him the “Father of Pan-Africanism.” That year, he presided over the fifth Pan-Africanist Congress, held in Manchester, England. Du Bois and many of the Africans who attended the meeting, the latter newly radicalized by World War II and the ensuing decolonization movements, called for the denunciation of Western imperialism. Du Bois believed that the United States enabled colonialism, proclaiming, “We American Negroes should know [that] until Africa is free, the descendants of Africa the world over cannot escape their chains. The NAACP should therefore put in the forefront of its program the freedom of Africa in work and wage, education and health, and the complete abolition of the colonial system.”²³

Bunche approached foreign policy very differently, and he elected to work within established American systems of governance and diplomacy. Bunche, an American political scientist, diplomat, and civil rights advocate, played an instrumental role in the formation and administration of the United Nations; he served as the assistant to the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine, and thereafter as the principal secretary of the UN Palestine Commission. Most of all, he played a major role in establishing a peace agreement between Israel and the Arab states in 1949, for which he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1950. He felt great concern for the condition of people of African descent in America and abroad. Always conscious of the status of people of African descent, he argued:

Today, for all thinking people, the Negro is the shining symbol of the true significance of democracy. He has demonstrated what can be achieved with democratic liberties even when grudgingly and incompletely bestowed. But the most vital significance of the Negro to American society is the fact that democracy which is not extended to all of the nation's citizens is a democracy that is mortally wounded.²⁴

In contrast to Bunche, Du Bois, with his confrontational nature, did not win any peace prizes. Rather, his forceful critique of American imperialism, combined with the paranoia of millions of Americans, landed him in a web of anticommunist suspicion and anger. In the sobering American environment of the Cold War, black Americans with connections to the Communist Party of America (CPUSA), as well as those who denounced the United States for virtually any reason, were singled out for distrust and interrogation. Celebrated writers Langston Hughes and Richard Wright were forced to defend their patriotism before the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), whereas even established civil rights leaders such as Thurgood Marshall and Walter White, persons with no communist connections whatsoever, took great care to support the federal government's anticommunist rhetoric and actions explicitly to protect themselves from the witch hunt. These men and other leaders of African American communities were particularly careful to align themselves with the pro-civil rights efforts of Harry S. Truman, who, as vice president, assumed the presidency upon Roosevelt's death on April 12, 1945.

From the beginning, the Truman administration was swept up in the whirl of anticommunist fear and panic that was consuming the nation. Truman endorsed loyalty programs in which government employees were fired when suspected (by virtually anyone willing to accuse them) of disloyalty to the United States. This environment of paranoia regarding the spread of communism soon developed into so-called "red-baiting" within the government itself. The charge came to be embodied by Senator Joseph McCarthy (R-WI), who used the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations to hunt for communists and turned "McCarthyism" into a popular movement to glorify himself, crusade against the notion of communist sympathy, and root out anyone identified as communist sympathizers. McCarthy's targets eventually spread to the entire U.S. citizenry, with a particular focus upon those in Hollywood and the entertainment industry. Outspoken and elderly scholars were targeted by HUAC as well; the eighty-three-year-old Du Bois was indicted on February 8, 1951, and called an "agent of a foreign principal" for his collaboration with the Peace Information Center. Although HUAC had dismissed the charge by November 1951 due to lack of evidence the indictment, nonetheless, castigated Du Bois for his activism and shed light on his difficult relationships with other black activists. Indeed, many African Americans failed to defend his name following the indictment, both out of fear that they

themselves might be the next target by HUAC and because many of them had long been criticized by Du Bois and were not particularly interested in defending him now.

Other prominent African Americans, including the outspoken singer and actor Paul Robeson, were also brought before HUAC. Robeson, unlike many of those dragged before HUAC, had worked with the CPUSA during the 1930s. He had also traveled at one time to the Soviet Union as one of a wave of liberal activists who initially supported the rise of communism in the Soviet Union. Most of his fellow travelers ended their support of the Soviet Union either upon learning of the pact between the Soviet Union and Germany in 1939, or later, when the genocide and state-sponsored violence the Soviet government used to maintain the Soviet state and its satellites became known. Robeson, however, did not end his support of the Soviet Union, and continued to speak publicly on the nation's behalf in the United States. He argued, for example, that "it is unthinkable that American Negroes would go to war on behalf of those [United States] that have oppressed us for generations against a county [the Soviet Union] which in one generation has raised our people to full human dignity of mankind." In the highly charged atmosphere of the Cold War, the general public was quick to criticize Robeson's views and denounce him for them. For instance, a Robeson concert, held on August 27, 1949, in Peekskill, New York, was disrupted by crowds of local whites who, before Robeson arrived, attacked concertgoers with baseball bats and rocks. At another Robeson concert, in Peekskill, on September 4, 1949, marauding groups of protesters burned crosses on a nearby hill, and a jeering crowd threw rocks and chanted, "Dirty commie" and "Dirty kikes." Robeson, who was on his way to perform, made more than one attempt to get out of the car and confront the mob but was restrained by his friends.²⁵ Given the fear-mongering of HUAC at the time, it is not surprising that Robeson soon found himself before the committee. In 1950 the State Department revoked his passport, and he was consequently unable to leave the United States legally until 1958, when the U.S. Supreme Court declared this and other travel bans unconstitutional. As a performer and artist with an international following, Robeson found revocation of his passport to be particularly punitive. During another HUAC investigation into Robeson, in 1956, the activist and artist refused to pledge, in writing, that he was no longer a member of the CPUSA. These investigations contributed mightily to the end of Robeson's long and successful career.

The persecution of Robeson illustrates the conservative maneuvering that undermined progressive influences in the black freedom struggle. By 1948, African Americans constituted a critical political constituency. Their needs emerged as inescapable issues for anyone seeking public office to address, particularly those desiring the office of the presidency. African Americans' rising political influence, coupled with their country's budding fidelity to emerging nations and the rise of the civil rights movement, facilitated major changes in the federal government's relations with black people. Furthermore, a Communist coup in Czechoslovakia in February 1948 reignited tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union. Many officials in both countries believed a war between the superpowers was imminent. Ranking leaders in the U.S. military worried about the nation's ability to prosecute such a war, in part because black Americans had already voiced their opposition to ever serving again in racially segregated armed services. In response to Truman's move to resuscitate the draft, Randolph threatened the federal government with massive black resistance to induction.

Randolph meant what he said, and he wasted no time preparing to battle the segregation of the U.S. military. In 1947, he had formed the League for Non-Violent Civil Disobedience against Military Segregation (NCDAMS). Through this organization, in 1948, he warned America that African Americans would not comply with a racially segregated draft. From his pulpit and his seat in Congress, the outspoken Adam Clayton Powell Jr., a fearless, dashing, and highly controversial minister and Harlem, New York activist, championed Randolph's stance. Indeed, Powell proclaimed that the United States did not possess enough jails to accommodate all of the black people who would refuse to serve. On June 24, 1948, pressure increased on the Truman administration when the Soviet Union instituted a military blockade on the divided city of Berlin in Germany. Truman viewed this action as a potential precursor to war, and he could ill afford to be drawn into a volatile and protracted conflict with African Americans on the eve of a potential conflict with the Soviet Union.

To appease Randolph and his black constituency, Truman publicly recognized the need for progress in American race relations when he created a special commission on civil rights. Its report, entitled *To Secure These Rights*, called on the federal government to deliver what the NAACP and other groups had begun requesting decades earlier: a federal antilynching law; equal opportunity in education, employment, and housing; the

end to all poll taxes that limited a citizens' ability to vote; and the end of racial segregation in the military. Upon receiving the report, Truman asked for the instantaneous execution of these requests in a special address to Congress on July 26, 1948. Southern Senators filibustered the measures, prompting Truman to issue Executive Order #9981, which desegregated the U.S. Armed Forces. Although the power of southern senators prevented many of the report's recommendations from becoming law, Truman's action had been bold and clear. Following the issuance of the executive order, Randolph and Grant Reynolds, cochair of NCDAMS, dissolved the organization and canceled all planned protests against the military and federal government.

Though Truman courted black voters with his pro-civil rights overtures and executive order, a large number of black and white leftists threw their support behind Henry Wallace, the Progressive Party's presidential candidate in the election of 1948. Wallace campaigned aggressively throughout the South for black civil rights. He endeared himself to African Americans with his down-to-earth style and wit, and he impressed them by refusing to address segregated gatherings. Those who supported Wallace included a number of persons affiliated with the CPUSA, including Hosea Hudson, a well-known Alabama Communist. These controversial associates eventually destroyed Wallace's chances for election. Moreover, the Democratic presidential nominating convention embraced a civil rights platform as well. This prompted many progressives to support Truman as the Democratic Party candidate. Many blacks also supported Truman because he was a member of the same political party as Senator Hubert Humphrey, whom they thought well of in light of his support for civil rights. The Democrats also benefited because they lacked Wallace's political baggage. In the end, foreign and domestic pressures, as well as political dynamics and transformations, led to the Democratic Party's support for the civil rights of black Americans and its selection of Truman as its candidate. At the same time, however, support for black rights hurt the Democrats in the South, commencing the white shift to the Republican Party. In 1948, a group of white right-wing Democrats organized by southerners who objected to the Democrat's Civil Rights Platform formed the Dixiecrat Party in Birmingham, Alabama. The Dixiecrat Party nominated Governor Strom Thurmond of South Carolina for President in 1948. In the general election he received more than 1 million votes and carried four states.

African Americans Enter the “Mainstream”

African Americans continued to make advances in the worlds of arts, sports, and entertainment during the Cold War. Though the big bands of the swing era struggled to survive by the late 1940s, popular singers such as Ella Fitzgerald, Nat “King” Cole, Sarah Vaughn, and Billie Holiday continued to have successful careers. Increasingly static and often overly orchestrated swing music inspired young jazz artists, such as saxophonist Charlie Parker, trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie, and pianist Thelonious Monk, to create their own more fluid and dynamic style of music. These musicians abandoned big bands for small, concentrated, experimental ensembles, known for playing a new, more popular genre called bebop. Although bebop quickly became a popular new genre of music, gospel music and “race music,” which would soon come to be known as rhythm and blues (R&B), became more popular and long-lasting. By 1950 African American gospel was featured at Carnegie Hall when Joe Bosstic produced the Negro Gospel and Religious Music Festival. Black gospel and white gospel quickly emerged as distinct genres, with specific audiences. Black gospel artists, such as the celebrated Mahalia Jackson, found success among black and white listeners. Most black gospel artists, however, were shunned by the predominantly white gospel mainstream. “Race music,” a fusion of African American music genres such as blues, jazz, and gospel, soon coalesced into a distinct genre called rhythm and blues. Song writers and recording artists such as Little Richard, Ike Turner, and Ray Charles combined the music of the black church and southern blues clubs, or “juke joints,” to forge the bedrock of R&B.

Writers also met with continued success. The highly acclaimed poet Gwendolyn Brooks, for example, garnered numerous awards and honors for her work, including Guggenheim Fellowships in 1946 and 1947 and a Pulitzer Prize for poetry for “Annie Allen” in 1950. She was the first African American ever to receive a Pulitzer in any category. Black film stars also found new opportunities. Lena Horne, Ethel Waters, Eddie Robinson, Butterfly McQueen, and Bill Robinson starred in films such as *Cabin in the Sky* (1943) and *Stormy Weather* (1943), which boasted all-black casts and played to large black and interracial audiences. These stars often lamented the fact that Hollywood film makers had pigeonholed black actors and actresses, largely limiting them to stereotypical roles such as “Mammies” and “Uncle Toms.” Many black people today, however, view

these actors as pioneers who made the most of the limited opportunities offered to them.

Jackie Robinson (1919–72), a professional athlete and advocate for black freedom, is perhaps the most iconic figure of black pride during the Cold War years (see fig. 4). Jack Roosevelt Robinson was born in Cairo, Georgia, where he was reared in destitution as the first of five children born to a single mother. Not long after Jackie's father abandoned his family, his mother, Mallie Robinson, joined the exodus of African Americans leaving the South and moved her children and extended family of thirteen west to Pasadena, California. Jackie attended John Muir High School, then Pasadena Junior College, where he proved himself an exceptional athlete capable of playing football, basketball, and baseball, as well as running track. In 1938 he was named the region's Most Valuable Player in baseball. He remained in school, however, at the University of California, Los Angeles, where he made history by becoming the first student to collect varsity letters in four sports. As previously mentioned, Robinson was drafted by the U.S. Army in 1942, but his service ended promptly (he was honorably discharged), when he refused to submit to the Army's policies of racial segregation. His courageous protest of Jim Crow in the military presaged his impact on professional baseball and American society.

Following his discharge from the Army in 1944, Robinson played in the Negro Leagues, his first experience with professional baseball. Soon thereafter, something momentous happened: Robinson was selected by Branch Rickey, a vice president with the Brooklyn Dodgers, to integrate major league baseball. In preparation for the move, Rickey signed Robinson to the Montreal Royals, a farm team for the Brooklyn Dodgers, in 1945. Rickey knew that Robinson would face difficult times as a young black athlete in professional baseball, which was then wholly dominated by whites. In fact, Rickey made Robinson promise to keep his composure when he became the target of white racism. As Rickey had expected, Robinson was tested the minute he stepped onto the field. Many of his white teammates shunned and harassed him, and fans jeered, cursed, spat, and threw things at him. He and his family even received death threats on a daily basis.

Despite the racial abuse he endured, Robinson distinguished himself as a professional athlete and was brought up to the Dodgers the next year. He took the field on April 15, 1947, becoming the first African American to play in baseball's major leagues. Players on rival teams said that they would



FIG. 4. Jackie Robinson talking to his son Jackie Robinson Jr., February, 20, 1950. AP Photo (500220049).

not play against the Dodgers because of Robinson's presence. Even some of his Brooklyn Dodgers teammates threatened to sit out games in which Robinson played. However, not all of Robinson's teammates shared the same opinion. League President Ford Frick and Baseball Commissioner Happy Chandler put their administrative support behind Robinson, as did Hank Greenberg and Dodgers captain Pee Wee Reese, two popular players. Reese, in particular, showed a physical act of support by putting his arm around Robinson after fans continually heckled and yelled racist insults. In spite of the harassment from fans and certain teammates,

Robinson stood courageous on the field and resisted the temptation to respond to his hecklers, either verbally or otherwise. He more than proved his worth on the field, hitting twelve home runs in his first year alone, leading the league in stolen bases, and helping the Dodgers win the National League pennant. He was also selected as Rookie of the Year. Robinson tallied an outstanding .342 batting average during the 1949 season, again led the National League in stolen bases, and earned the National League's Most Valuable Player (MVP) award. By 1955, he was one of the National League's best players and had led the Dodgers to a successful trip to the World Series.

Robinson's winning personality and success as an athlete soon endeared him to Americans of all colors. He became the highest-paid player in Dodgers history, and his achievements in major league baseball paved the way for other black players who, at the time, had been relegated to the Negro Leagues, including such superstars as Satchel Paige, Willie Mays, Monte Irvin, Larry Doby, and Hank Aaron. Robinson was not only a leader on the field, but he was also a vocal supporter of other black athletes and of black civil rights. In July 1949, he boldly went before HUAC to testify about discrimination, and he publicly denounced the Yankees as a racist organization in 1952, citing the team's failure to desegregate even five years after he had personally broken the "color line" in the major leagues with the Dodgers. Robinson connected himself to other black activists, consulting with civil rights leaders, such as Thurgood Marshall and Adam Clayton Powell Jr., often lending his support to their efforts to combat racial injustice.

The Push for Civil Rights

During and after World War II, African Americans continued to influence American society and local and national politics. In 1943 William L. Dawson (D-IL) won election to the U.S. House of Representatives, where he joined Adam Clayton Powell Jr., as the only black representatives in Congress. By 1950 Powell and Dawson had sufficient seniority in Congress to wield considerable power on behalf of African Americans. The NAACP opened itself up to new ideas and collaborations, allying with leftist politicians, labor unions, and Jewish groups in a broad coalition that became the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights in 1950. The NAACP was still unable to fulfill its decades-old quest to secure a federal antilynching bill, but black attorneys, benefiting from the foundational work of Charles

Hamilton Houston, used the organization's precedent-setting cases of the 1930s through 1950, including *Missouri ex rel. Gaines v. Canada* (1938), *Sipuel v. Oklahoma* (1946), *McLaurin v. Oklahoma* (1950), and *Sweatt v. Painter* (1950), to move the nation increasingly closer to the eradication of racial segregation in education. These cases, addressing graduate and professional education, rested on the argument that although states had provided separate arrangement for black educational opportunities, those institutions were not equal to their white counterparts. The courts agreed: the strategy of using the doctrine of "separate but equal," offered by the Supreme Court in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) to demolish separate but unequal educational opportunities worked wonders.

The students that Houston trained at Howard University Law School, as well as others who were inspired by his painstaking attack on the legality of racial segregation, continued to advocate for black civil rights. Thurgood Marshall, Constance Baker Motley, Oliver Hill, Robert L. Carter, Robert Ming, James Nabrit Jr., Louis Redding; Jewish attorney Jack Greenberg; historians John Hope Franklin, C. Vann Woodward, and Alfred Kelley; and psychologist Kenneth Clark, through the auspices of the NAACP's Legal Defense and Educational Fund (NAACP-LDEF), attacked the heart of racial segregation and the nation's "separate but equal" doctrine by arguing that "separate" is inherently unequal, period. Although they were often ignored, mocked, threatened, or assaulted, these men and women traversed the entire nation, alone and in groups, building their cases. In 1950, this crack team of antisegregation crusaders took on a suit filed by Harry Briggs, a Navy veteran, and twenty-four other residents of Clarendon County, South Carolina, who objected to the treatment their children faced in public school. These black children were forced to walk eighteen miles round trip, each day, to a segregated black school that offered no heat, electricity, or bathrooms. The case, known as *Briggs v. Elliot* (1952), was the first legal challenge to elementary school segregation in the South.

As the *Briggs* case attempted to attack school segregation in the South, civil rights activists in other regions of the country waged their own battles against school segregation. One such battle proved to be an extremely important front in the larger war against sanctioned racism in American schools. By 1953 members of the NAACP and other activist groups in Phoenix, Arizona were successful in ending segregation in secondary education in *Phillips v. the Phoenix Union High School District*. The ruling in *Phillips* was the first in the United States to declare racial segregation in

public schools unconstitutional, and it set an important precedent that would aid Marshall in his fight against school segregation nationally. In the South, the *Briggs* case fused with three others in Delaware, Virginia, and Kansas that were also making their way through the federal courts.

The most famous such case involved Linda Brown, a seven-year-old African American girl in Topeka, Kansas, who, every day, had to walk one mile, crossing a dangerous railroad yard, to a bus station where she waited for more than an hour to board a bus that took her to a “black elementary school” that was farther away from her home than the nearby “white elementary school.” Oliver Brown, Linda’s father, opposed school segregation and was appalled by the racist circumstances in which his daughter attended school. He and thirteen other black parents, in turn, tried to enroll their children in the local “white schools” in the summer of 1950, but were turned down because they were black. The parents solicited help from the NAACP and, together, they filed suit against the Topeka Board of Education under the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. The case was named after Oliver Brown because he was the first parent listed in the lawsuit. After losing the case at the state level, the NAACP merged the case with those in Virginia and Delaware and appealed to the United States Supreme Court on October 1, 1951. Together, these cases would constitute the famous *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education* case that would strike a death blow to *Plessy* and the “separate but equal” doctrine.

The arduous work of the NAACP Legal Defense team would ultimately pay off. Marshall and his fellow civil rights attorneys and professionals faced a formidable legal team headed by John W. Davis, a former U.S. solicitor general from South Carolina who had argued many cases before the Supreme Court, more than any other attorney of his era. When arguments for the case commenced on December 9, 1952, the Supreme Court’s chambers were filled to capacity. Arguing on behalf of the students from South Carolina, Marshall was direct, logical, and poised. He appealed to the Court to confront the *Plessy* dogma directly, proclaiming that *de jure* segregation was arbitrary and capricious. He argued that *Plessy* was a “legal aberration, the faulty conception of an era dominated by provincialism, by intense emotionalism in race relations, and by the preaching of a doctrine of racial superiority that contradicted the basic concept upon which our society was founded.” He also posited that Americans in the twentieth century had demonstrated, by virtue of their fighting two world wars to

“make the world safe for democracy” and by combating tyranny at home, that the racist principles upon which *Plessy v. Ferguson* rested “obviously tend to preserve not the strength but the weakness of our heritage.”²⁶

Brown v. Topeka Board of Education (appendix 3, page 311) captured the attention of all Americans and stimulated intense debate. Even as Marshall made his arguments, most black people and their allies reached relative consensus on the value of racial integration. However, most white people supported school segregation at that time, and they hoped the Supreme Court would issue a quick ruling that affirmed just such a position. The Court, however, remained deeply divided, as well as doubtful of its ability to enforce a ruling mandating desegregation. The delay was, in some ways, a blessing. Earl Warren, the former Republican governor of California, was appointed on September 30, 1953 by newly elected President Dwight D. Eisenhower to fill the vacancy left by the death of Chief Justice Fred Vinson. Warren worked diligently to persuade the justices to rule on behalf of desegregation. Some speculated that the former governor used this case to make a principled amends for his complicity in the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II; he was committed to repudiating racial injustice this time around.

The ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education* came on May 17, 1954. That day, Marshall stood before the justices as Warren announced a unanimous decision that “in the field of public education the doctrine of ‘separate but equal’ has no place” in schools. (See fig. 5.) The court had determined that a designation based wholly upon race was a violation of the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution. Segregation in public schools was abolished. The *Brown* ruling led to the unraveling of the entire legal edifice of Jim Crow (though unofficial structures remained) which had governed the lives of African Americans since Reconstruction. It also provided a powerful precedent to inform future constitutional crises involving race. In this sense, the case benefited not only African Americans, but also millions of other people of color in America.

Conclusion

Between 1939 and 1954, African Americans made major gains by organizing and using their unique culture of struggle, which deployed their spiritual, intellectual, artistic, athletic, and rhetorical skills in the service of their quest for freedom, and by challenging the United States to fulfill its



FIG. 5. George E. C. Hayes (*left*), Thurgood Marshall (*center*), and James M. Nabrit celebrate outside the U.S. Supreme Court in Washington DC on May 17, 1954, immediately after legal segregation in public schools was abolished. Library of Congress.

promise of freedom and democracy to all. Despite facing overwhelming odds, they intensified their calls for racial justice, revamped their activist organizations, and forged new alliances. They took steps forward against the backdrop of World War II, one of the most violent and complex conflicts in modern history, and the ensuing Cold War. Blacks merged their

fight for racial equality with the growing struggle for political, economic, and social progress at home and abroad. Their efforts forced President Roosevelt to issue Executive Order #8802 and compelled President Truman to issue Executive Order #9811. These orders reflected major victories for black workers, who could now seek redress for discrimination in defense industries, and for African American service personnel, who sought equal treatment when they risked their lives for their country. These measures, coupled with the landmark *Brown* decision, significantly improved the lives of African Americans.

The success of black civil rights leaders, performers, and athletes embodied the realization of dreams long deferred and provided hope for millions of other African Americans. Ralph Bunche's Nobel Peace Prize, Ella Fitzgerald's music, Gwendolyn Brooks's poetry, and Jackie Robinson's integration into professional baseball uplifted black people amid the ever-present reality of racial subordination. The Cold War ushered in an era of suspicion, distrust, and suppression, and particularly limited the freedom available to militant voices such as Robeson and Du Bois. More moderate groups, such as the NAACP-LDEF, however, fought for racial healing by utilizing universal principles of freedom and equality and the structural mechanisms of the state. The forthcoming modern civil rights movement would both build upon and transcend these monumental advancements. The black freedom struggle would soon reach its high point and become the most dynamic, powerful, and effective movement to combat white supremacy in history.